

Prime Minister OLMERT. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of the U.S. Congress, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the people and the State of Israel, I wish to express my profound gratitude to you for the privilege of addressing this joint meeting of the U.S. Congress. This building, this Chamber, and all of you stand as a testament to the enduring principles of liberty and democracy.

More than 30 years ago, I came to Washington as a young legislator thanks to a program sponsored by the State Department. I had a chance to tour this building, and I saw then what I believe today, that this institution, the United States Congress, is the greatest deliberative body in the world. I did not imagine then that a day would actually come when I would have the honor of addressing this forum as the Prime Minister of my nation, the State of Israel.

The United States is a superpower whose influence reaches across oceans and beyond borders. Your continued support, which, I am happy to say, transcends partisan affiliations, is of paramount importance to us. We revere the principles and values represented by your great country and are grateful for the unwavering support and friendship we have received from the U.S. Congress, from President George W. Bush, and from the American people.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I am a success today because I had a friend who believed in me, and I didn't have the heart to let him down."

Israel is grateful that America believes in us. Let me assure you that we will not let you down.

The similarities in our economic, social and cultural identities are obvious, but there is something much deeper and everlasting. The unbreakable ties between our two nations extend far beyond mutual interests. They are based on our shared goals and values stemming from the very essence of our mutual foundations.

This coming Monday, the 29th of May, you commemorate Memorial Day for America's fallen. The graves of brave American soldiers are scattered throughout the world: in Asia and in the Pacific, throughout Europe and Africa, in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. The pain of the families never heals, and the void they leave is never filled.

It is impossible to think of a world in which America was not there in the honorable service of humanity. On Monday, when the Stars and Stripes are lowered to half-mast, we, the people of Israel, will bow our heads with you.

Our two great nations share a profound belief in the importance of freedom and a common pioneering spirit deeply rooted in optimism. It was the energetic spirit of our pioneers that enabled our two countries to implement the impossible, to build cities where swamps once existed and to make the desert bloom.

My parents, Bella and Mordechai Olmert, were lucky. They escaped the persecution in the Ukraine and Russia and found sanctuary in Harbin, China. They immigrated to Israel to fulfill their dream of building a Jewish and democratic state living in peace in the land of our ancestors.

My parents came to the Holy Land following a verse in the Old Testament in the book of Second Samuel: "I will appoint a place for my people Israel and I will plant them in their land and they will dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more."

Distinguished Members of Congress, I come here, to this home of liberty and democracy, to tell you that my parents' dream, our dream, has only been partly fulfilled. We have succeeded in building a Jewish democratic homeland. We have succeeded in creating an oasis of hope and opportunity in a troubled region. But there has not yet been one year, one week, even one day of peace in our tortured land.

Our Israeli pioneers suffered, and their struggle was long and hard. Yet even today, almost 60 years after our independence, that struggle still endures. Since the birth of the State of Israel and until this very moment, we have been continually at war and amidst confrontation. The confrontation has become even more violent, the enemy turned even more inhumane due to the scourge of suicide terrorism. But we are not alone. Today, Israel, America, Europe, and democracies across the globe, unfortunately, face this enemy.

Over the past 6 years, more than 20,000 attempted terrorist attacks have been initiated against the people of Israel. Most, thankfully, have been foiled by our security forces. But those which have succeeded have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians and the injury of thousands, many of them children guilty only of being in what proved to be the wrong place at the wrong time.

These are not statistics. These are real people with beautiful souls that have left this Earth far too soon.

In the decade I served as mayor of my beloved city, Jerusalem, we faced the lion's share of the seemingly endless wave of terrorism.

I remember Galila, a 12-year-old Ethiopian immigrant, whose parents worked in the King David Hotel. On one particular morning, her parents, overwhelmed by the fear of riding a bus in the city of Jerusalem, told their daughter, "Galila, perhaps this morning, just this morning, we'll take you in the family car to your school."

And Galila said to her parents, "Oh, come on. Don't be silly. I know where to sit in the bus. I will be safe in the bus. Don't worry for me." It so happened that on that same day, the suicide attacker ascended that same bus and chose to sit just next to her.

When I visited her grieving parents, her mother came to me sobbing and she said, "You are the mayor. You have so much influence in this city. Will you do us just one last favor."

Please try to find out something, just one item of remembrance that we will be able to take with us for the rest of our lives. Maybe just a shoelace of Galila's." I did everything a mayor could do. I summoned the police. I summoned the security forces. I instructed the municipal workers. I told them, "Go look out wherever you can." And then they came back and they said to me, "Mr. Mayor, nothing. Nothing. Not even a shoelace."

Among the victims of this brutal and unremitting terror, I am sorry to tell you, are also American citizens. Only last week, Daniel Cantor Wultz, a 16-year-old high school student from Weston, Florida, who came to spend the Passover holiday with his parents in Israel, succumbed to his severe injuries incurred in Israel's most recent suicide attack.

I asked Daniel's parents and sister, Yekutiel, Sheryl and Amanda Wultz, who only finished the traditional period of mourning 2 days ago, to be with us here today. Daniel was a relative of Congressman **ERIC CANTOR** of Virginia, an honorable Member of this House. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

I bring Galila's memory, Daniel's memory, and the loss of so many others with me to my new post as Prime Minister. I also bring with me the horrific scenes I saw with my own eyes when I visited New York just a few days after the devastating attacks on September 11, a tragedy that transcends any other terrorist attack that has ever occurred.

As I told my good friend, Rudy Giuliani, on that dreadful day, our hearts went out to you, not only because of the friendship between us but because, tragically and personally, we both know what it is to confront the evil of terrorism at home.

Our countries do not just share the experience and pain of terrorism. We share the commitment and resolve to confront the brutal terrorists that took these innocent people from us. We share the commitment to extract from our grief a renewed dedication to providing our people with a better future.

Let me state this as clearly as I can: We will not yield to terror. We will not surrender to terror. And we will win the war on terror and restore peace to our societies.

The Palestinian Authority is ruled by Hamas, an organization committed to vehement anti-Semitism, the glorification of terror, and the total destruction of Israel. As long as these are their guiding principles, they can never be a partner.

Therefore, while Israel works to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population are met, we can never capitulate to terrorists or terrorism. I pay tribute to the firmness and the clarity with which the President and this Congress uphold this crucial principle which we both firmly share.

Israel commends this Congress for initiating the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act which sends a firm, clear message that the United States of America will not tolerate terrorism in any form.

Like America, Israel seeks to rid itself of the horrors of terrorism. Israel yearns for peace and security. Israel is determined to take responsibility for its own future and take concrete steps to turn its dreams into reality. The painful, but necessary, process of disengagement from the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria was an essential step.

At this moment, my thoughts turn especially to the great leader, who, in normal circumstances, should have stood here. Ariel Sharon, the legendary statesman and visionary, my friend and colleague, could not be here with us, but I am emboldened by the promise of continuing his mission. I pray, as I am sure you all do, too, for his recovery.

Ariel Sharon is a man of few words and great principles. His vision and dream of peace and security transcended time, philosophy, and politics. Israel must still meet the momentous challenge of guaranteeing the future of Israel as a democratic state with a Jewish majority, within permanent and defensible borders and a united Jerusalem as its capital that is open and accessible for the worship of all religions.

This was the dream to which Ariel Sharon was loyally committed. This was the mission he began to fulfill. It is the goal and the purpose of the Kadima Party that he founded and which I was the first to join. And it is this legacy of liberty, identity, and security that I embrace. It is what I am working towards. It is what I am so passionately hoping for.

Although our government has changed, Israel's goal remains the same. As Prime Minister Sharon clearly stated: "The Palestinians will forever be our neighbors. They are an inseparable part of this land, as are we. Israel has no desire to rule over them, nor to oppress them. They too have a right for freedom and national inspirations."

With the vision of Ariel Sharon guiding my actions, from this podium today, I extend my hand in peace to Mahmoud Abbas, the elected President of the Palestinian Authority. On behalf of the State of Israel, we are willing to negotiate with a Palestinian Authority. This authority must renounce terrorism, dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, accept previous agreements and commitments, and recognize the right of Israel to exist.

Let us be clear: peace, without security, will bring neither peace nor security.

We will not, we cannot, compromise on these basic tests of partnership.

With a genuine Palestinian partner for peace, I believe we can reach an agreement on all the issues that divide us. Our past experience shows us it is possible to bridge the differences between our two peoples. I believe this, I know this, because we have done it before, in our peace treaties with Egypt and with Jordan. These treaties involved painful and difficult compromises. It required Israel to take real risks.

But if there is to be a just, fair and lasting peace, we need a partner who rejects violence and who values life more than death. We need a partner that affirms in action, not just in words, the rejection, prevention, and elimination of terror.

Peace with Egypt became possible only after President Anwar Sadat came to our Knesset and declared: "No more war and no more bloodshed." And peace with Jordan became possible only after the late King Hussein, here in Washington, declared the end of the state of belligerency, signed a peace treaty with us, and wholeheartedly acknowledged Israel's right to exist.

The lesson for the Palestinian people is clear. In a few years, they could be living in a Palestinian state, side by side in peace and security with Israel, a Palestinian state which Israel and the international community would help thrive.

But no one can make this happen for them if they refuse to make it happen for themselves.

For thousands of years, we Jews have been nourished and sustained by a yearning for our historic land. I, like many others, was raised with a deep conviction that the day would never come when we would have to relinquish parts of the land of our forefathers. I believed, and to this day still believe, in our people's eternal and historic right to this entire land.

But I also believe that dreams alone will not quiet the guns that have fired unceasingly for nearly a hundred years. Dreams alone will not enable us to preserve a secure, democratic Jewish state.

Jews all around the world read in this week's Torah portion: "And you will dwell in your land safely and I will give you peace in the land, and there shall be no cause for fear. Neither shall the sword cross through the Promised Land."

Painfully, we the people of Israel have learned to change our perspective. We have to compromise in the name of peace, to give up parts of our promised land in which every hill and every valley is saturated with Jewish history and in which our heroes are buried. We have to relinquish part of our dream to leave room for the dream of others, so that all of us can enjoy a better future. For this painful, but necessary, task my government was elected. And to this I am fully committed.

We hope and pray that our Palestinian neighbors will also awaken. We hope they will make the crucial distinction between implementing visions that can inspire us to build a better reality and mirages that will only lead us further into the darkness. We hope and pray for this, because no peace is more stable than one reached out of mutual understanding, not just for the past but for the future.

We owe a quiet and normal life to ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. After defending ourselves for almost 60 years against attacks, all our children should be allowed to live free of fear and terror.

And so I ask of the Palestinians: How can a child growing up in a culture of hate dream of the possibility of peace? It is so important that all schools and all educational institutions in the region teach our children to be hate-free.

The key to a true, lasting peace in the Middle East is in the education of the next generation.

So let us today call out to all peoples of the Middle East: replace the culture of hate with an outlook of hope.

It is 3 years since the Road Map for Peace was presented. The Road Map was and remains the right plan. A Palestinian leadership that fulfills its commitments and obligations will find us a willing partner in peace. But if they refuse, we will not give a terrorist regime a veto over progress, or allow it to take hope hostage.

We cannot wait for the Palestinians forever. Our deepest wish is to build a better future for our region, hand in hand with a Palestinian partner; but, if not, we will move forward, but not alone.

We could never have implemented the Disengagement plan without your firm support. The Disengagement could never have happened without the commitments set out by President Bush in his letter of April 14, 2004, endorsed by both Houses of Congress in unprecedented majorities. In the name of the people of Israel, I thank President Bush for this commitment and for his support and friendship.

The next step is even more vital to our future and to the prospects of finally bringing peace to the Middle East. Success will only be possible with America as an active participant, leading the support of our friends in Europe and across the world.

Should we realize that the bilateral track with the Palestinians is of no consequence, should the Palestinians ignore our outstretched hand for peace, Israel will seek other alternatives to promote our future and the prospects of hope in the Middle East. At that juncture, the time for realignment will occur.

Realignment would be a process to allow Israel to build its future without being held hostage to Palestinian terrorist activities. Realignment would significantly reduce the friction between Israelis and Palestinians and prevent much of the conflict between our two battered nations.

The goal is to break the chains that have tangled our two peoples in unrelenting violence for far too many generations. With our futures unbound, peace and stability might finally find its way to the doorsteps of this troubled region.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, allow me to turn to another dark and gathering storm casting its shadow over the world.

Every generation is confronted with a moment of truth and trial. From the savagery of slavery, to the horrors of World War II, to the gulags of the Communist bloc, that which is right and good in this world has always been at war with the horrific evil permitted by human indifference.

Iran, the world's leading sponsor of terror, and a notorious violator of fundamental human rights, stands on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons. With these weapons, the security of the entire world is put in jeopardy.

We deeply appreciate America's leadership on this issue and the strong bipartisan conviction that a nuclear-armed Iran is an intolerable threat to the peace and security of the world. It cannot be permitted to materialize. This Congress has proven its conviction by initiating the Iran Freedom and Support Act. We applaud these efforts.

A nuclear Iran means a terrorist state could achieve the primary mission for which terrorists live and die: the mass destruction of innocent human life. This challenge, which I believe is the test of our time, is one the West cannot afford to fail.

The radical Iranian regime has declared the United States its enemy. Its President believes it is his religious duty and his destiny to lead his country in a violent conflict against the infidels. With pride he denies the Jewish Holocaust and speaks brazenly, calling to wipe Israel off the map.

For us, this is an existential threat, a threat to which we cannot consent. But it is not Israel's threat alone. It is a threat to all those committed to stability in the Middle East and the well-being of the world at large.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, our moment is now. History will judge our generation by the actions we take now, by our willingness to stand up for peace and security and freedom, and by our courage to do what is right.

The international community will be measured not by its intentions, but by its results. The international community will be judged by its ability to convince nations and peoples to turn their backs on hatred and zealotry.

If we don't take Iran's bellicose rhetoric seriously now, we will be forced to take its nuclear aggression seriously later.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, the true Israel is not one you can understand through the tragic experiences of the complex geopolitical realities. Israel has impressive credentials in the realms of science, technology, high tech and the arts, and many Israelis are Nobel Prize laureates in various fields.

A land with limited resources, eager to facilitate cooperation with the United States, Israel devotes its best and brightest scientists to research and development for new generations of safe, reliable, efficient and environmentally friendly sources of energy.

Both our countries share a desire for energy security and prevention of global warming. Therefore, through the United States-Israel Energy Cooperation Act and other joint frameworks, in collaboration with our U.S. counterparts, Israel will increase its efforts to find advanced scientific and technological solutions designed to develop new energy sources and encourage conservation.

Just one example of Israel's remarkable achievements is the recent \$4 billion purchase by an American company of Israel's industrial giant Iscar. This is an important endorsement of the Israeli economy, which has more companies listed on NASDAQ than any country other than the United States and Canada. It is also a vote of confidence in Israel's strategic initiative to enhance the economic and social development of our Negev and Galilee regions.

But above all, it is recognition that what unites us, Israel and America, is a commitment to tap the greatest resource of all, the human mind and the human spirit.

Ladies and gentlemen, we believe in the moral principles shared by our two nations, and they guide our political decisions.

We believe that life is sacred and fanaticism is not.

We believe that every democracy has the right and the duty to defend its citizens and its values against all enemies.

We believe that terrorism not only leads to war but that terrorism is war, a war that must be won every day, a war in which all men and women of good will must be allies.

We believe that peace among nations remains not just the noblest ideal but a genuine reality.

We believe that peace, based on mutual respect, must be and is attainable in the near future.

We, as Jews and citizens of Israel, believe that our Palestinian neighbors want to live in peace. We believe that they have the desire, and hopefully the courage, to reject violence and hatred as means to attain national independence.

The Bible tells us that as Joshua stood on the verge of the Promised Land, he was given one exhortation: "Chazak Ve'ematz." "Be strong and of good courage."

Strength, without courage, will lead only to brutality. Courage, without strength, will lead only to futility. Only genuine courage and commitment to our values, backed by the will and the power to defend them, will lead us forward in the service of humanity.

To the Congress of the United States and to the great people of America, on behalf of the people of Israel, I want to say today: chazak ve'ematz, be strong and of good courage; and we, and all peoples who cherish freedom, will be with you.

God bless you.

And God bless America.

Thank you.